

Time to get going on freeway planning

In days of yore – well, a decade and a half ago, more or less – Ahwatukee represented the southern border of the populated Valley, with its few businesses huddled along the Warner-Elliott Loop and little but saguaros and desert visible beyond the junkyard that represented the whole of Ray Road commerce.

But, of course, times change. Ahwatukee added not only to its acreage but its name – Ahwatukee Foothills, thank you very much – and as the years passed, this cul-de-sac of the Valley flowed both west and south, until Pecos Road became less of a hot rod heaven and more of a necessary route to reach the burgeoning neighborhoods paralleling South Mountain.

No longer was there desert north of the power lines that represented the border between southern Phoenix and the vast Gila River Indian Community; now houses and schools and businesses marched along the north side of Pecos, in ever growing density.

Which brings us to the muddled present. While the state of Arizona ponders how to afford to whack a freeway through those very neighborhoods that have appeared and multiplied, the empty land to the south is beginning to fill, too.



In This Corner

by Terry Bledsoe
Columnist

The state still hopes to reach agreement with the Gila River community to permit construction of the 26-mile connection with I-10 in the West Valley on Indian land, which would save as many as 685 homes in Ahwatukee Foothills, depending on whether the road is built at grade or below.

Even then, the Department of Transportation estimates that it will have to buy and destroy 255 residences along the route, 235 in Ahwatukee Foothills. That works out to an imposing \$454,901 per house. And that, of course, is before the first yard of concrete is laid.

Part of the problem is that while the proposed freeway has been on area maps for years, space has been dwindling and prices rising while decisions have been delayed. In 2002, the Maricopa Association of Governments estimated the freeway's total cost at \$1.1 billion. Planners say the current cost could be as high as \$2.4 billion.

And it won't get any cheaper now that Gila River has caught the development bug

itself. The reservation is already the site of a lavish golf course-cum-resort complex; plans were announced last week for a massive project from Pecos Road south, and along both sides of I-10.

The work will begin east of the interstate, but flow west of it further south. Planners envision an 11,000-acre project just southwest of Chandler – and nearly one-third as large as that city – that would include industry, retail outlets, offices and perhaps even homes.

The reservation has already suggested to ADOT that it would like I-10 expanded throughout its length to permit more Indian development, a request that would surely invite a response seeking tribal land for the freeway to the west.

For everyone's sake, and before more of the desert fills up, it's time to get going.

Bledsoe's column is published every first and third Wednesdays.

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